

HEALTH

NEWS FROM THE HEALTH PROMOTION AGENCY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



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Warning on drinking at home

Taking the wrappers off costly Christmas 'cheer'

The wraps are set to come off the real cost of alcohol in Northern Ireland homes this Christmas.

The Health Promotion Agency, the Northern Ireland Fire Brigade and the Community Affairs Branch of the RUC are teaming up to underline the safety risks of stocking up on too much seasonal 'cheer'.

"Drinking and driving is now established in most people's minds as a safety issue, especially at this time of year," says Rob Phipps, the Agency's Alcohol Programme Manager. "But armchair tipping is still seen as relatively harmless when in fact it can also cause serious injury and loss of life."

Alcohol has been recognised as a significant factor in house fires. In the province, for example, the Fire Brigade has estimated

that about 60 per cent of deaths throughout the year could be drink-related.

Police officers - often called to intervene in domestic incidents fuelled by alcohol - say it is important to raise the issue at a time when home drinking reaches a peak.

Check

The Christmas campaign, which also has the full support of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, follows the Northern

Ireland summer drive to keep a check on home drinking.

"Many people enjoy a drink in the house with friends or family in the season of goodwill but moderation should be the motto," Rob says.

The Agency's alcohol fact sheets 'How do you measure up at home?' are available from health centres and other outlets supplied by the health promotion departments of the Health and Social Services Boards.

Witty approach to wiping out the weed

Dr Alan Blum believes in fighting smoke with fire.

The fast-talking Texan doc has a scorching line in humour which he says is guaranteed to "laugh the tobacco pushers out of town."

Founder of the radical lobby group Doctors Ought to Care (DOC), he has pioneered a campaign of humorous, tit-for-tat counter-advertising on tobacco in the American media.

Brand name ridicule includes the advertising of an Emphysema Slims tennis tournament for example instead of a Virginia Slims event.

Ridicule

"The tobacco industry can cope with being seen as the devil," he says. "What it really cannot cope with is ridicule."

Doctors can play a major role in tackling the tobacco problem, Dr Blum firmly believes.

"At present, family doctors and other health professionals are trying to appeal to knowledge - pointing out the dangers of smoking. But there is also a lot to be gained by appealing to attitudes," he says.

For kids

"Most people talking to young people who smoke say 'You're not old enough'. In my surgery when I talk to young smokers I ask what brand they use and say 'You're too old to be smoking those - they're just for kids!'"



Superhealth - Texan doctor Alan Blum is blazing a trail around the world with a radical message on how to deal with the tobacco problem.

"A simple sticking plaster with the words 'Don't Smoke' written on it in pen and stuck on a patient's arm can be far more effective than expensive and gimmicky nicotine patches if we rethink the way we talk."

Like Superman, Dr Blum is planning to 'leap' the tall buildings occupied by tobacco advertisers - sporting his Superhealth 2000

SMOKING CAUSES ZOO BREATH DON'T SMOKE
Love, Doc

T-shirt as he blazes a trail around the world with his radical approach to one of the globe's most devastating health problems.

"I always tell audiences that my talks carry a health warning," he says. "And I really hope that they are hazardous to most people's preconceptions about how we should be dealing with the tobacco problem!"

The year of the family

Happy, healthy families will be the aim of the International Year of the Family which gets under way in January.

"The idea is to celebrate the strengths and diversities of families today and to develop a more family-friendly society," says Northern Ireland Co-ordinator Lynne Crowther.

"And we are not necessarily talking about the image of a mother, father and two children. An American once defined a family as 'people who eat out of the same



fridge" so the year will focus on the rich variety of

family units including single parents and step families."

The year has the following underlying themes - quality of family life, support for families, employers, employees and customers, sport leisure and tourism, arts and culture.

"Health is of course very important. We look forward to working with as many organisations and individuals as possible in what promises to be a very exciting 12 months," said Lynne.